Flue Cured Virginia Tobacco in the ongoing auctions in Andhra Pradesh is ruling above the Minimum Support Price for the commodity.

(b) Does not arise.

Agreement in WTO

164. SHRI MOOLCHAND MEENA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether in a bid to reach an agreement on a negotiating framework for key issues like agriculture and non-agriculture, the World Trade Organisation General Council Chairman has urged members to work towards arriving at a shared understanding of the package as early as possible;

(b) if so, whether Government have made any efforts with other countries to solve agriculture norms/non-agriculture issues in the WTO; and

(c) if so, to what extent it has succeeded and by when a final decision is likely to be taken by WTO?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) India has been coordinating regularly with the other Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) having similar interests and concerns on various issues in the on-going negotiations under the Doha Work Programme, including in agriculture. Thus India is part of developing country groupings like the G-20 (Agriculture) and G-16 (Singapore Issues). In respect of all these issues, including agriculture and non-agricultural products' market access, discussions are taking place in the various negotiating bodies constituted in WTO in order to come to an understanding on the 'framework' of negotiations. These efforts are aimed at achieving a balanced outcome, including special and differential treatment for developing countries to enable them to meet their developmental and trade concerns. The negotiations are formally scheduled to conclude by 1 January, 2005 in accordance with the mandate given by the WTO Ministers at Doha in November 2001. At this stage, since the negotiations are on-going, it is difficult to estimate the success or otherwise of India's efforts in these negotiations.

Revival of tea sector in West Bengal

165. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received any proposal from the Government of West Bengal for reviving the ailing tea sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of the steps Government have taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (c) The Government of West Bengal has forwarded a copy of the Report of the Committee constituted by the State Government to study the crisis in tea industry. Major recommendations of this Committee include mandatory sale of 100% teas through auction, introduction of electronic trading systems at all auction centres, tightening of auction system to prevent proxy bidding, review of the sampling norms and capping levels, opening of new auction centre at Jalpaiguri, fixation of norms for rejuvenation cycle for tea bushes, grant of interest subsidy on bank finances etc. The recommendations of the committee are under examination by the Government.

Tea auctions

166. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to restrict the sale of tea through auctions;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the measures taken to bring the tea produced by the small and marginal growers to the auctions?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) No. Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The small and medium growers produce un-processed tea leaves which is sold as raw materials either to bought leaf factories or estate factories for processing. The auctions do not handle un-processed tealeaves. The manufacturers (either estate factory or bought leaf factory) have the option to sell their teas either through auctions or through non-auction route. In order to encourage the tea manufacturers to route their teas through auctions, the following measures have been taken:—

(i) Tea Board has issued directions on auction rules for